

Statement to Legislative Hearing on Transition Services on September 24th, 2014.

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Patricia Stavola. I live in Glastonbury and I have 4 children, 3 of them at the public high school.

Two of them are on the Autistic spectrum. Both are boys, a 14 yro freshman and a 17 yro junior. We are working on a transition program for my 17 yro who is considered to have "classic autism".

Support for teens and young adults who need a different level of coaching, either socially, for a job or to tackle a higher level of education is lacking even in some established special needs programs. There is no standard with autism. When a student is presented who has different needs than what is previously known some districts balk at providing support that is not already defined. Parents are required to spend time and often money to challenge existing or non-existent programs. Then if a parent does win the fight they are usually required to sign an agreement that includes a confidentiality clause so other families cannot benefit from their experience and expenditure.

My 17 yro autistic son is on an academic track. He takes mostly regular ed classes with little modification and has a B average. He is also very immature emotionally, socially and his outlook (judgment) is that of younger child.

Because of this immaturity, the district has agreed that he will need additional time after his senior year (19 yro) to work on independent living and social skills. To do this he will be enrolled in the Post Grad program when he completes his required credits (he will get a certificate and get a diploma when finished with Post Grad).

Although capable of handling the course work at a community college, he is not ready emotionally or socially to handle a college campus or college classes without some additional professional support for a period of time.

The district has been telling me since middle school he will be able to go to college (to take college level classes) and yet, I was advised, in writing, that the Post Grad program does not support students taking community college classes.

Over the next few years I intend to challenge this but to do so will require hiring an attorney. Although I am a good advocate for my children I am under no illusion that I can get any concession from the district without an attorney.

I have used an attorney for 4 of the 7 years my children have been in the district. This was to get through obstacles (3 hour time limit on observation by a professional during an Independent evaluation) and fight for other programs for my children. Due to confidentiality clauses I am not able to specify or extend my experiences to other parents.

The cost for this has been extensive to our family but my children should be able to live independent lives. They are intelligent and capable of becoming contributing, taxpaying, citizens. They need some additional instruction and direction when they start something new but when they get that they thrive.

Autistic children grow up to become autistic adults. Autism doesn't go away but it can be modified for some with training and instruction. For many this training and instruction becomes less needed over time as they mature. It only makes sense, morally and economically, to give that training and instruction as early as the student or young adult can benefit from it.

I appreciate my being able to speak to you today, thank you for your attention,

Patricia Stavola

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